

## Ourense



*Ancient and medieval Ourense*  
a walk of  
**history and life**



# Ourense



OURENSE, CAPITAL OF THE PROVINCE OF THE SAME NAME, WAS FOUNDED BY THE ROMANS IN A WONDERFUL STRATEGIC LOCATION, A NATURAL MEETING POINT OF ROADS AND RIVERS. IT SITS IN A LOW-LYING AREA OF THE RIVER MIÑO VALLEY, NESTLED BETWEEN HILLS JUST 135 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL, WHICH MAKES FOR A WIDELY VARIABLE CLIMATE OVER THE YEAR.

ITS FAMOUS NATURAL SPRINGS MAKE IT THE HOT SPRING CAPITAL OF GALICIA AND IT BOASTS THE SECOND HIGHEST NUMBER OF THERMAL SPRINGS IN EUROPE AFTER BUDAPEST. THE THOUSAND YEAR OLD AS BURGAS SPRINGS ARE WORTHY OF SPECIAL MENTION, AS ARE THE NUMEROUS THERMAL BATHS ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER MIÑO, WHICH FORMS A GREEN CORRIDOR WHERE NATURE AND WELLBEING ABOUND.

OURENSE IS BLESSED WITH SHOPS AND FASHION DESIGNERS, AS WELL AS AN AREA OF MEDIEVAL STREETS AND SQUARES TEEMING WITH MONUMENTS, CHURCHES, MANSIONS, AND AN 18TH CENTURY AREA OF EXPANSION THAT IS HOME TO BEAUTIFUL MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE. IT IS A CITY FULL OF SURPRISES THAT ARE JUST WAITING TO BE EXPLORED.



# Essentials

A Praza Maior



B Casa de Fermin García



C Catedral Basílica de San Martiño



D Igreja de Santa Maria Nai



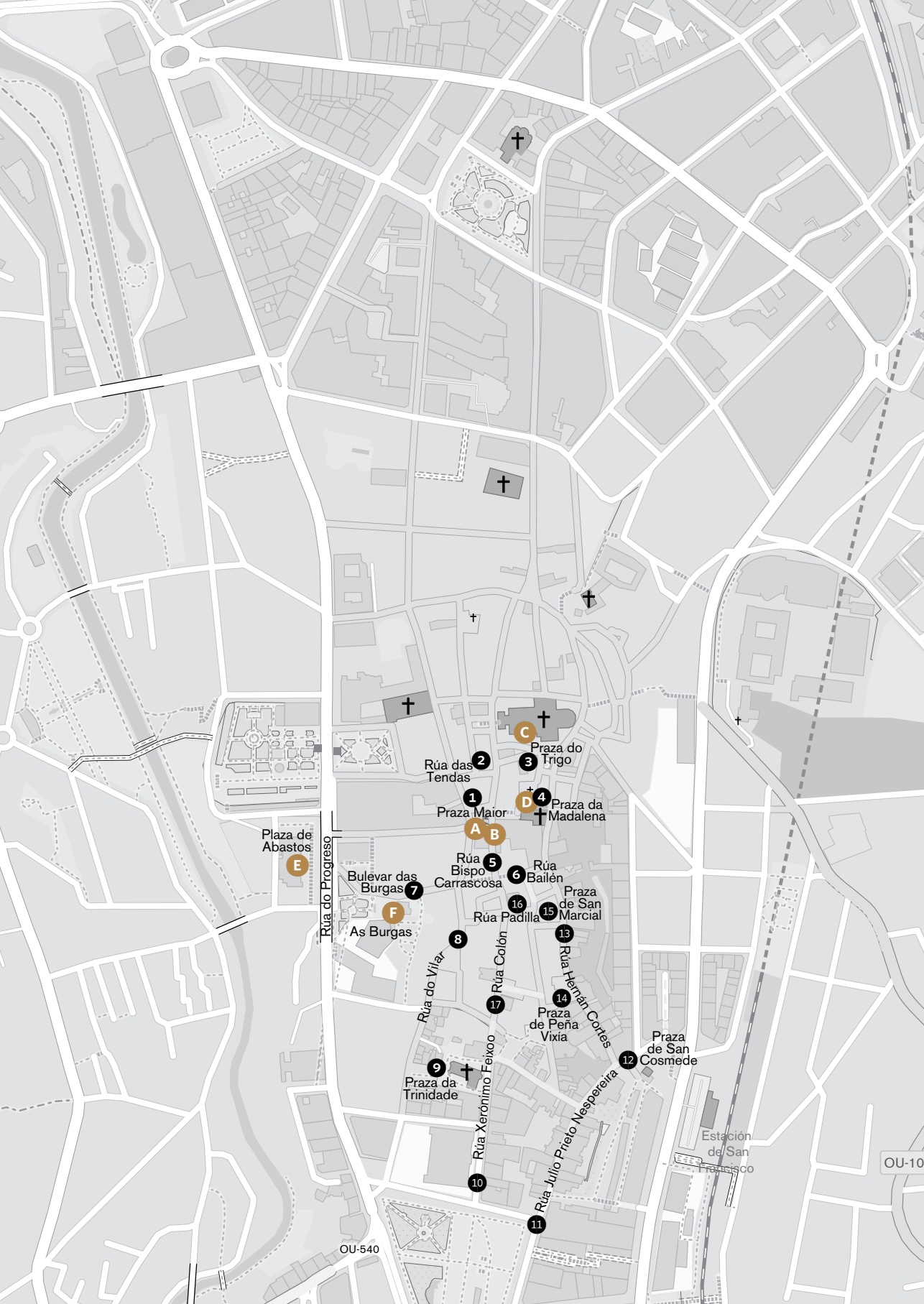
E Praza de abastos y rianxo



F As Burgas



# The route



- 1 Praza Maior
- 2 Rúa das Tendas
- 3 Praza do Trigo
- 4 Praza da Madalena
- 5 Rúa Bispo Carrascosa
- 6 Rúa Bailén
- 7 Bulevar das Burgas
- 8 Rúa do Vilar
- 9 Praza da Trindade
- 10 Rúa Xerónimo Feixo
- 11 Rúa Julio Prieto Nespereira
- 12 Praza de San Cosmede
- 13 Rúa de Hernán Cortés
- 14 Praza de Pena Vixía
- 15 Praza de San Marcial
- 16 Rúa Padilla
- 17 Rúa de Colón





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We begin our tour in the **Praza Maior** <sup>1</sup> (Main Square), previously known as the Plaza del Campo (Countryside Square), the site of the market in Medieval times. We are immediately struck by the slope of the square and the raised promenade added in the 19th

century as a place to see and be seen, which is now fully of lively terraces.

The square offers a rich variety of civil architecture, with buildings from the 17th to the 19th century, ranging from the very humble built in adobe to the largest built in granite by successful traders. The latter include the **CASA DE FERMÍN GARCÍA** (House of Fermín García), who added tiles to the façade, which was completely unheard of at the time. Furthermore, it is the only one in the whole square to have circular columns, which some

**FACING** Praza Maior

**BELOW** Casa de Fermin Garcia







people have interpreted as a symbol of the Freemasonry. The ground floor was used as store for ironware whilst the owner lived on the first floor. The rest of the building was rented out. The tenants included a Jewish husband and wife who ran a dental surgery on the second floor for 25 years after coming to Ourense when they escaped the Russian Revolution in 1917. They never thought they would have to flee again to Paris in 1936! Today, the building houses the Afundación exhibition space.

The square is presided over by the building of the main office of OURENSE CITY COUNCIL. The building itself dates back to 1888 and we can see the three features of the coat of arms of Ourense on its wrought iron balconies: the lion, the bridge, and the tower.

The Praza Maior is one of the liveliest places in the city due to the numerous cafes that can be found there. It is especially busy on the mornings of the first Sunday of every month when it hosts an interesting antiques market, where we can find everything from coins, stamps, books, and CDs to decorations. It is heaven for collectors.

In the arcades we have Tenda Artesana (no. 12), a shop selling artisan products, steel fashion jewellery, souvenirs, items made in

**ABOVE** Praza Maior is one of the liveliest places in the city

**BELOW** Sombrerería La Lucha



different minerals, and gifts. It belongs to the Aixiña non-profit organisation. The traditional, charming wooden façade of the premises is an eye-catching sight.

At no. 10 on the raised promenade is the innovative EnOu Workshop, which, as well as selling craft and design items, offers courses and workshops on a wide range of subjects. Their products include small pieces of jewellery that can be customised or clothes that have been hand printed by emerging creators. .

A few steps away, at no. 7, we find another traditional shop, the Mercería La Dalia haberdashery, known as As Dúas Irmás (The Two Sisters), which opened in 1918 on the nearby rúa das Tendas (Shops street). The products they stock include Spanish mantilla shawls, formal combs, bridal garters, vintage veils, and a wide selection of threads, lace, and buttons.



We simply cannot leave the square without stopping in front of the sign for the Casa de los Lentes, erected in 1904, when the founder of the shop, who had recently arrived from Cuba, decided to purchase the building so as to open an optician's, which also sold watches, fashion jewellery, and ironware, on the ground floor. Nowadays, the main shop, which opened in 1967, is at no. 2 rúa do Paseo and is still one of the leading optician's in the city.

Following along **rúa das Tendas 2**, we see Nikis Galicia Style, a firm that puts their own take on some of the important points and quirks of Galician culture on their t-shirts and gift items. At no. 3, we come to the Sombrerería La Lucha hat shop, which is now more than one hundred years old and still keeps the inside almost exactly like it was in

**ABOVE** Town Hall House

**BELOW** Casa de los Lentes









1917. The hallmark of this shop is the wonderful customer service, where they make sure to explain the features of each hat.

From here, we make our way to the Praza de San Martiño (Saint Martin's Square) to go see [MAIN FAÇADE OF THE CATHEDRAL](#), which is dominated by a large stairway from the 80s that is almost entirely unadorned. The 40 metre tall Torre de las Campanas (Bell Tower) rises over the area and is a good place to visit for a fine panoramic view over the city.

The Catedral basílica de San Martiño (Cathedral basilica of Saint Martin) is one of five in Galicia. It was built between the 12th and 13th centuries in honour of San Martín de Tours (Saint Martin of Tours), patron saint of the city. A visit to the three masterworks it holds inside is a must: the Pórtico del Paraíso (Portico of Paradise), which retains the coloured painting; Capilla del Santo Cristo (Christ's Chapel) with its lavish Baroque decoration reflects the glory of the Church at the time; and the Main Altar which has an altarpiece by master craftsman Cornielles de Holanda. We would also encourage you to go and see the unique granite board games carved into the base of the cathedral which helped some of the faithful endure the interminable ceremonies.

**PREVIOUS PAGES** Cathedral  
**FACING** Pórtico del Paraíso polychrome  
**ABOVE** Praza do Trigo



The entrance to the cathedral is in the **Praza do Trigo** ③ (Wheat Square), where you can see the battlements and defensive towers that give the cathedral the appearance of a fortress. In this porticoed square, which used to be a hub for silversmiths, potters, and grain traders, we can also view some prominent mansions of traders. They include the 18th century Casa de los Temes (House of Temes) at no. 4, which features timelessly elegant decoration on its cornice and balconies.

After leaving the cathedral, we head to the adjacent **Praza da Madalena** ④ (Madeleine Square), where there used to be the old fruit and vegetable market and a cemetery, as shown by some gravestone to one side. The square is one of the most beautiful spots in the city. It is perfect for a quiet break in one of the terraces, especially when the camellias are flowering and it bursts into life and colour.





On one side of the square is the [IGLESIA DE SANTA MARÍA NAI](#) (church of Saint Mother Mary), patron saint of tailors, which was built on the same site where the first Christian church in Ourense probably stood, as proven by the marble columns that have been reused on its façade. If we want to get the best view of the church, we should go down the large staircase, which was a source of conflict between the diocese and the city council. This historic dispute is remembered on Easter Sunday in the “Ceremonia del Desplante” (Ceremony of Affront), when council officials leave the procession at the foot of the staircase after the clergy refuse to let them enter the church.

On the corner is the old [PALACIO EPISCOPAL](#) (Episcopal Palace), a civil Romanesque building from the 12th century. This is an enormous fortress-like building which was the seat of power in Ourense since the days of the Romans, so it is no surprise that it has undergone multiple changes since then. The ostentatious episcopal coat of arms of Muñoz de la Cueva figures prominently on the façade and on one side we can still see the mullion window from which the bishop would check on the mood of the city.

**FACING** The grand staircase of the Iglesia de Santa María Nai, with the Palacio Episcopal next to it

Continuing along [rúa Bispo Carrascosa](#) **5**, we come across a similar coat of arms on the façade of the old episcopal jail, also known as the [CÁRCERE DA COROA](#) (Jail of the Crown), due to the odd prisoner haircut that left the crown of their heads bald.

We head down the stairs to [rúa Bailén](#) **6**, where at no. 6 we come to the small [YOUTH CIRCUS MUSEUM](#), a tribute to the Youth Circus and Father Silva, who, in the 60s created the first circus school in Spain, as a means to include socially excluded young people. Their tours, focused on acrobatics shows and the absence of animals, became internationally famous.

Next door, at no. 4, the [Comercio Xusto](#) shop sells Fairtrade products, craft items, eco-friendly stationery, and board games from small cooperatives from all over the world, as well as food products, such as cacao, sugar, coffee, and tea, which come from environmentally-friendly farms.

On the nearby [rúa das Burgas](#) **7**, we find two unique shops: [Terko](#) and [Pet Sounds](#). The former, at no. 3, is the perfect place for fans of the military look, as its goods include first and second-hand combat backpacks, clothing, hats, and tents from several European armies. The latter, at no. 5, is a paradise for collectors of vinyl records, comic books, books, and CDs.





We now reach the As BURGAS (Hot Springs) area, where the main thermal springs in the city and perhaps the most extraordinary site in Ourense are located. The water here has flowed at a temperature of more than 60 °C for over two thousand years at a rate of 300 litres per minute. It is low in minerals and has been used for many different purposes since the Romans settled the area, either as a place of worship, healing, leisure, or wellbeing.

At the entrance to the public thermal pool is the traditionally designed 17th century BURGA DE ARRIBA fountain. In the pool site we can see the replicas of four Roman altars that were found during the archaeological excavations. The first one on the left stands out. It honours nymphs and shows Calpurnia Abana, a well-known name in Ourense who, according to archaeologists, would have been one of the first “tourists” in the city to be drawn by the fame of the springs..

The BURGA DE ABAJO is the most well-known one due to its shape and the abundant flow of water. It has a striking fervedoiro, a small tank with carbonated water that seems to be constantly bubbling. Pilgrims travelling on the Via de la Plata route to Compostela would sleep at this site. Until recently it was

**FACING** As Burgas  
**ABOVE** Enjoying in the public thermal pool



also used by traders at the food market who made use of the fountains to pluck poultry after dipping them in the hot water. Nowadays, it is common to see locals filling up water bottles to take advantage of the healing properties of the water, which is especially useful for skin conditions.

In this area we can now find shops, such as As Fontes and Artesanía Oreta Xiro, where we can pick up a wide range of gifts and craft items. Food is also on the menu with the Don Pablo Gourmet shop, where we can choose from a good selection of Galician products, such as chestnut biscuits, albariño pastries, candied greens, artisanal preserves, as well as wine and liqueurs from the five Galician denominations of origin.

If you are interested in fresh produce, then a trip to the PLAZA DE ABASTOS (FOOD MARKET) IS A MUST. THE MUNICIPAL MARKET building was built in the 1920s and due to some building works the market has been temporarily moved to La Alameda park. It proves irresistible for anyone who loves traditional markets, especially because of the rianxo, an area around it of small fruit and vegetable and bread stalls selling produce from the local area. We strongly recommend you





visit on the 7th, 17th, and 26th of the month when the fair is held (if they fall on a Sunday or holiday it moves to the following day), as the area teems with 250 stalls offering craft items, textiles, accessories, shoes...

After this area, we now retrace our steps and return to **bulevar das Burgas** (Burgas boulevard) 7, a pleasant area of gardens where we can see the archaeological remains of the early baths from the time of the Romans. If you want to dive deeper into the history of the springs and, more broadly, spas in Ourense, you should visit the [AS BURGAS INTERPRETATION CENTRE](#).

From here we now make our way to **rúa do Vilar** 8, dating back to the 12th century and believed to be the oldest street in the city, which leads us to the **Praza da Trindade** 9 (Holy Trinity Square), where we come to the [IGLESIA DE LA TRINIDADE](#) (Church of the Holy Trinity). This Gothic church was built between the 12th and 13th centuries, making it one of the oldest in Ourense, and it may have links to an old pilgrim hospital. The Re-

**ABOVE** Market  
**FACING** Peacock of the Jardín del Posio

nnaissance door opens onto a beautiful atrium where the pediment of a different hospital, the San Roque (Saint Roch) hospital, can be seen. The towers flanking the façade highlight its defensive role.

On the nearby **rúa Xerónimo Feixoo** 10 we pass by the [ESCUELA DE OTERO PEDRAYO](#) (Otero Pedrayo school), which was the first lay school in the city. It opened in 1896 and is a clear example of historicist architecture. We can conclude our visit in the [XARDIN DO POSÍO](#) (Posio Garden), which was originally the school's botanical garden. We can go for a stroll in it among the palms and exotic trees, look at the aviaries, or have a quiet coffee on the terrace of [Cafetería Picasso](#), and watch the peacocks roaming around the area.

We continue our tour along **rúa Julio Prieto Nespereira** 11 and at no. 32 we come to the award-winning [A Taberna](#) restaurant. The decoration provides an early 20th century ambience with the dishes hanging on the stone walls, the old china cabinet, and the wooden coffered ceiling. The modern take on traditional cuisine is supplemented by a wine list with over 300 options and it has held the "Q" for Tourism Quality seal since 2010. At no. 23 is [El Buen Tapeo](#), by chef Ignacio León, author of the "Fusionemos la cocina" (Let's fusion cooking) cookbook and blog of the same name where he shares recipes and food tips.

Our tour now takes us to the **Praza de San Cosmede** 12 (Saint Cosme's Square) which takes its name from the 16th century chapel dedicated to two brothers: San Cosmede and San Damián (Saint Cosme and Saint Damian), generous doctors and Christian martyrs. Today, it is home to the [ARTURO BALATAR EXHIBITION SPACE](#). The gallery contains the famous, unique nativity scene by this Ourense sculptor, a work comprising more than 100 painted pieces shaped from mud, which depict episodes from the province of Ourense and scenes from Traditional Galician life.

We carry on along **rúa de Hernán Cortés** 13, previously known as rúa dos Brancos (White street) because of the colour of the white marble counters where the butchers sold their wares. We now come to the **Praza de Pena Vixía** 14 (Punishment Watch Square), where [Rock Club](#) is to be found. This legendary Ourense nightspot has been open since 1997 and is considered one of the best rock venues in Spain. [El Pueblo Café Cultural](#) is also in this square, which started out as a way to promote the newest and most daring trends in music, painting, literature, and photography.

We next cross the **Praza de San Marcial** 15 (Saint Martial's Square), also known as the Praza Fonte dos Coiros (Leather Fountain Square) because there used to be a fountain there that was used to wash hides before tanning. Tea enthusiasts can visit the [Tetería](#)

[Grándola](#) teahouse and, next door, the Cha shop, which stocks 180 different varieties of tea and infusions as well as a wide range of tea brewing and drinking accessories.

From here we make our way along **rúa Padilla** 16 to **rúa de Colón** 17, where some craft workers and traders have recently set up shop. [A Picota](#), specialising in silversmithing, is at no. 27. The pieces here are inspired by Celtic and Roman motifs, such as torcs, triskelions, and knotwork. At no. 24, [A Bufarda](#) is a children's shop, where you can find educational and participatory toys, alongside more traditional ones made from tinplate, cloth, or recycled plastic. However, it is the original puppets that most captivate children. To get back to our starting point, we just need to follow rúa de Colón towards the Praza Maior.





### **San Francisco historical-artistic site**

In the higher area of the city is the RÚA DE ESTRELA VIEWPOINT, which offers us beautiful views of the cathedral and the old town, especially from the terrace at CAFETERÍA MIRADOR SAN FRANCISCO.

On the other side are the remains of the OLD FRANCISCAN CONVENT, which became an army barracks in the mid-19th century and after restoration work has been converted into the Archivo Histórico Provincial (Provincial Historical Archive). The 14th century cloister of the old convent has been preserved. It stands as a beautiful example of the Galician Gothic style with 63 lavishly decorated pointed arches, capitals, and brackets, as well as the eye-catching entrance to the chapter house. Next to it, in the Antigua Capilla de la Venerable Orden Tercera (old chapel of the Third Order of Saint Francis) we can take in a temporary exhibition hall with works from the Museo Arqueológico Provincial (Provincial Archaeological Museum), including an interesting selection of sculptures from the museum's collection. The museum itself is in the Praza Maior but is currently under renovation.

**FACING** Puente Viejo

A visit to the CEMENTERIO DE SAN FRANCISCO (Saint Francis cemetery) is also worthwhile, as it was a prototype of the 19th century romantic graveyard and was declared a Site of Cultural Interest due to its neo-Gothic and Baroque mausoleums, which attest to the wealth of the merchant class in Ourense. Important writers, artists, and industrialists from the city, such as Otero Pedrayo, Eduardo Blanco Amor, and Valentín Lamas-Carvajal, are buried here.

### **Riverbanks, bridges, and spas on the Miño**

The River Miño is a fundamental part of Ourense as the main green lung in the city and a major leisure area. Along its banks there is a 16 km walk which includes the trail known as the MIÑO SPA ROUTE. At almost 6 km in length, this trail takes in hot springs and outdoor thermal bathing areas surrounded by nature, some of which are free to enter whilst others have an admission fee. At the OUTARIZ SPRINGS we can find not only open-air bathing areas, but also spa facilities based on the Japanese Onsen hot spring tradition. The trail is rounded off by the traditional mineral water O Tinteiro spring, and the A Chavasqueira, Burga de Canedo, and Muíño da Veiga thermal baths. This last one takes its name from the mill that survives to this day, which is just one of the many that used to stand on the banks of the River Miño. Each of these sites offers water at different



## Other related guides



temperatures and with different properties, which makes for a unique relaxation, leisure, and wellbeing experience that positions Ourense as one of the foremost spa destination in Spain and beyond.

The THERMAL SPRING TRAIN leaves from the Praza Maior. This odd train takes us to these hot springs and bathing areas next to the river as we enjoy a journey with great views through the city. It is an inexpensive and handy way to get to such a unique space that every visitor should make sure to see.

The River Miño is also famous for the many bridges that cross it. These include the historic PUENTE VIEJO (Old or Roman Bridge), which was built in the 1st century and is one of the symbols of the city; PUENTE NUEVO (New Bridge), built in the 1920s to improve transport links; the VIADUCTO DEL FERROCARRIL (Railway Viaduct), a piece of 1950s engineering that linked Zamora and Ourense by

train; and the futuristic PUENTE DEL MILENIO (Millennium Bridge), inaugurated in 2001, which has become a wonderful viewpoint over the city and the river.

### **Santomé archaeological and nature area**

Located just a few kilometres from the city centre, it boasts specimens of Mediterranean and Atlantic plant life and offers good views of Ourense and the River Lonia ravine where this archaeological site stands. Dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E., it includes the remains of a Castro settlement and a Galician-Roman villa. It is open for visits and offers information boards to guide us and explain the life and culture of the time.

**ABOVE** Outariz springs







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